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SUBJECT: BETWEEN PLAGUE AND FAMINE: ASSISTANCE AND
DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

REF: ROME 001340

Summary

1. On the margins of FAO's March 1-5 Regional Africa Conference in Johannesburg, FODAG DCM Michael Cleverley and Agricultural Minister Counselor Geoffrey Wiggin discussed and visited World Food Program (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), NGO, and USAID operations in South Africa, Swaziland, and Zimbabwe. Even beyond the rhetoric and press play, the AIDS/HIV epidemic in this part of Africa was, from our observation, a humanitarian crisis of colossal historic proportions, one that preoccupied most conversations and much of everyday life, particularly in the countryside where people are most helpless.

2. Observing the FAO's and WFP's use of US resources was a primary objective, and we were happy to find some outstanding people implementing sometimes life-saving, other times income-expanding infrastructure-building projects. This was especially important in Zimbabwe, where a policy and public management implosion has destroyed the governance process, particularly as it applies to the critical questions of food and farming. We also were impressed with the extraordinary efforts NGOs were making to deal with the food aspects of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

3. The hand-off between WFP's food assistance and FAO's emergency operations appeared smooth during discussions at the Johannesburg headquarters for UN operations and with the projects we visited in Zimbabwe. However, it appeared somewhat anomalous that the US was funding large-scale resources for WFP's food distribution and FAO's long-term development activities (through 22 percent of the agency's regular budget), but was a relatively minor player in FAO's emergency operations. These FAO activities, often dependent upon extra-budgetary largess from donor countries, were where FAO appeared to be at its best, at least in AIDS- and drought-plagued southern Africa.

End Summary

WFP: Fully engaged and on top

4. During a March 5 side trip from the FAO conference to neighboring Swaziland, we received a better appreciation of the food crisis emanating from the southern African drought and HIV/AIDS epidemic. There, WFP targets the most vulnerable households 41 percent of Swaziland's population lives in female-headed households, 10 percent in child-headed households. Working through NGOs, WFP feeds about 150,000 people per month, 35,000 through school feeding programs. In early 2004, 15 percent of the country's population was beneficiary of WFP feeding.

5. With 38.6 percent of Swaziland's adult population HIV positive, the effects of the epidemic were all pervasive. We arrived early in the morning at a school feeding program at the Khuphuka Neighborhood Care Point for AIDS orphans and others unable to pay the \$60/year tuition fees. About 45 children, aged 5-18, gathered daily around a shack with no professional teacher. When one of our party organized singing and play for the children, they danced and sang a song whose words ran, "We all have AIDS, We are all dying from AIDS." The school feeding was the main source of nutrition for these children. At a nearby Manyeveni Primary School, enrollment had risen by 20 percent (to about 540 children) due to WFP's school feeding program that started up in July 2003. Located next to the school was a volunteer-run clinic that provided feeding for pregnant women and mothers of newly

born children. Again, the feeding program was the primary source of nutrition for these people.

16. What we saw in Zimbabwe corroborated the crucial need that we had found in Swaziland for highly targeted food assistance for the growing numbers of helpless. On the

first morning we visited the Porta Farm squatter village where WFP supported a school-feeding program and, through a local NGO, home care and food for families suffering from HIV/AIDS. Porta Farm was a very vulnerable community of people, once farm laborers on large commercial farms, and now uprooted and a pariah class for their association with the previous economic order. The Mugabe Government had dumped them on empty ground along the main road to Harare where they now have to fend for themselves. The only services available for this community of 10,000 were ten water taps and a primary school set up by an NGO. There are reportedly half a million of such former farm workers in Zimbabwe.

17. Our WFP hosts had us at Porta Farm in time for the school feeding. The food, coming from US and EU donors via the WFP, was a mix of corn meal, corn-soya blend, and vegetable oil cooked in large pots on wood fires by volunteer mothers. The feeding was strictly for the children. The headmaster of the schools said that enrollment is 1200 children, and he estimated "very conservatively" that there were no feeding the school would not have more than 800 students. A year ago, before the school feeding began, most of these children were malnourished. That had changed with school lunches. (The population of Porta Farm has virtually no land available for producing their own crops. Many families are trying to grow crops around their homes. The only local sources of income are collecting firewood, which is becoming increasingly difficult as more and more distant sources have to be tapped, and fishing. The community is located on the margin of an old commercial farm that has a reservoir rich in fish. The Porta Farm people catch fish and sell them to passing cars on the Harare road.) The houses were makeshift shacks made of mud, straw, cardboard, and tin whatever was available.

18. We made the morning rounds with a local NGO that delivered home care. The nurse provided rudimentary health care and WFP-supplied food to households suffering from AIDS. In one case the house was on the verge of collapsing on the invalid woman occupant she had had the strength to build it when in good health, but as AIDS weakened her, she was not able to correct the disrepair. In another similar hut, a young man and his wife sat on the dirt floor, exhausted by their AIDS infection, watching their two infant children, as they wasted away. WFP food kept them alive. Next, we went to the house of two children whose parents had already died from AIDS. At seven and twelve years old, these brothers had been catapulted into the world alone. If such personal

1 alienation from life can be degraded into a symbol, it is one of hopelessness shared by millions. But the seven year old cooked WFP soy-maize blend, and the older kept a garden. The nurse said the younger was smart and did a lot.

19. Given the complete lack of services (people don't even have the money for transportation to clinics to have their physical problems diagnosed and treated they sit and suffer), the food provided was medicine, sustenance and a suggestion of hope. WFP's representatives were fully engaged and on top these situations, as best as one could, moving food efficiently into the homes of the squatter village's worst cases.

FAO: Successful Emergency Operations

10. Like WFP, FAO appeared to have an outstanding staff dedicated to alleviating the region's food and agricultural production problems, especially through its emergency operations. FAO's Regional Emergency Coordinator for Southern Africa (RIACSO) is co-located with WFP, UNDP, UNHCR, and other UN agencies in a modern office complex outside Johannesburg. A collaborative informal atmosphere was evident. RIACSO, which coordinates all FAO emergency activities throughout southern Africa, was under the capable leadership of its director, Graham Farmer, an FAO official with long experience in the region, especially Zimbabwe.

11. We observed FAO emergency operations in the field in Zimbabwe. The drought of the last two seasons had exacted its toll from these people, leading them to question their normal ability to feed themselves.

Despite these doubts, and WFP food assistance and FAO input support, primarily seeds, it was apparent that under normal circumstances with supportive policies these are good farmers with a means to sustain themselves. Standing among the late planted corn and sorghum that looked good now that the rains had finally arrived (any planting done in September in anticipation of the normal arrival of the wet weather was for naught as drought continued), the seeds provided by FAO appeared providential, while food assistance looked unneeded. Nevertheless, when asked, the farmers insisted that after the shortages of the past two years, they had little intention of selling any grain.

¶12. In one communal farming area, FAO had introduced treadle pumps for irrigation. While FAO's wide advocacy for this simple water technology throughout Africa makes it a development cliché, its economic power in this instance was palpable. Most of the people using treadle pumps had built new homes over the past 2-3 years with proceeds from their higher yields. We met with a group of 14 farmers that had installed, with FAO help, these pumps. Their testimonials to the time savings and the extra income generated through their use was persuasive. The circumstances were attractive for treadles: the water table was not too deep below the surface and the amount of water allowed for irrigation most of the year. FAO's active representatives were not misstepping by jumping on the treadle pump wagon.

¶13. FAO's sub-regional director for southern and eastern Africa, Victoria Sekitoleko, spent half a day traveling with us, briefing, demonstrating, and answering our questions. A former Ugandan Minister of Agriculture, Ms. Sekitoleko appeared to be an exceptionally strong leader who was conversant with the political leadership and well known among the small farmers we met.

NGO Successes

¶14. We met several NGOs working hand-in-hand with WFP and FAO. NGOs both paralleled and extended the WFP food pipeline. Ninety-nine percent of FAO's emergency implementation was done through NGOs. While in Johannesburg, we spoke with both small and large NGOs working throughout southern Africa.

¶15. LDS Charities was a smaller operation and relatively new in Africa. Much of its work was coordinated closely with the ecclesiastical authorities of the LDS church. Recognizing its relative inexperience, the organization partnered with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Adventists, WFP, and several others. Last year it provided \$11 million of humanitarian assistance in southeast Africa. In Zimbabwe, LDS Charities had made available its meetinghouses for distributing WFP food assistance and to the Red Cross to which it had donated \$3 million for measles vaccinations. It had also used its meeting places to provide HIV/AIDS education to over 90,000 people in southern Africa.

¶16. C-Safe, an innovative USAID-funded consortium of CRS, World Vision, and Care, had pooled successfully the resources of these three large NGOs into a unitary coordinated effort with a program value of over \$100 million per year. This included 160,000 MT of food commodity in Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Zambia. In Malawi, C-Safe included six additional NGOs. C-Safe's director told us that they were still testing the consortium approach. So far, several advantages were apparent: the size of the organization has placed it in a strong advocacy position with a block voice, the participating NGOs were learning from each other, and they found themselves in a position to work more effectively with WFP, distributing risks of pipeline failures more broadly.

¶17. Accompanied by USDA Under Secretary Eric Bost, we

observed first hand how another the USAID-supported Humana People-to-People project saturated a community of about 100,000 people with HIV/AIDS education. In Durban Deep Township, not far from Soweto, the NGO aimed to reach every household in the community, and 90 percent of the people, over the three-year life of the activity. Working with a highly motivated and well trained cadre of ward workers (known as "passionates"), Humana ensured that the individuals were educated about HIV/AIDS. It also assisted them to develop a strategy to live with the disease and a belief in a possibly positive future. We went on house calls and were impressed with the knowledge that community residents had acquired about the disease. When Humana is finished, after three years, a team of

motivated local passionates will stay behind to carry on the work.

18. In South Africa's Northern Province, we also observed a USAID-sponsored NGO, the Promoting Agricultural Linkages (PAL) Project, transition traditional farmers from subsistence to commercial farming. The seminal activity brought buyers into forward contracts with selected farmers by guaranteeing a minimum purchase price for products that meet buyer specifications. The PAL both made farmers ready for meeting the challenges of marketing their produce, and lined up major buyers. The success of the activity, on a micro-level at least, was evidenced by the eager continuing participation of farmers that have benefited.

19. Ag MinCouns Wiggin also participated in a meeting between a white South African commercial farmer interested in selling his 4,500 ha. game ranch, and a consortium of black South Africans interested in buying the property. In a political environment fraught with uncertainty for white commercial farmers with large holdings (in part because of Mugabe's activities in neighboring Zimbabwe, and in part because of persistent rumors of changing land laws in South Africa) any amicable example of inter-racial land transactions on a "willing-buyer-willing-seller" basis was a valuable demonstration that the market economy for land can work.

Zimbabwe twinned plague and famine

20. A visit to Zimbabwe's communal farming areas pointed out some stark contradictions in the Government's handling of land tenure. Although these farming areas were deemed "communal," none of the farmers had title to his or her land. Farmers could not easily, if at all, buy and sell or acquire new holdings. While this may be more or less true in other African countries, the lack of title was a constraint to the rational use of the resource, to economies of scale, to land's moving into the hands of efficient producers, and to investment. The absence of a land market thus destined the farmers to remain on small five acre or less plots indefinitely.

21. In the areas of Zimbabwe we visited, we observed a critical need for continued food assistance for the country's hunger- and HIV/AIDS-inflicted groups. The drought may no longer be the factor it once was considered, and there was a question over whether general food distribution was any longer needed. However, targeted assistance, as labor-intensive and relatively expensive as it may be, is still badly needed by large numbers of people in Zimbabwe, especially those former farm workers whom the government dispossessed and re-located to squatter camps. The sad thing was that, even with the drought, Zimbabwe's food crisis was one that did not have to be. Perhaps the ancient Greek writer Hesiod, in the 7th century BC, said pretty much what was to be said about today's Zimbabwe when he wrote:
"How often have whole cities had to pay for choosing one who can but evil do? On them far-seeing Zeus sends heav'nly woes twinned plague and famine till the people die."

Comment

22. For future generations today's AIDS epidemic may remain one of the defining events of the late 20th and early 21st century, much as the plague was in earlier centuries. One big difference, of course, is that ignorance of the disease will not be a qualifying defense for our generation. In southern Africa, where the epidemic is at its worst, we saw the international community battling to deal with the epidemic, especially in producing and making available food in societies, the extent of whose devastation was still only becoming evident. WFP, FAO, and NGOs were fully engaged in this struggle.

23. There appeared to be a relatively smooth hand-off between WFP's immediate food assistance and FAO's emergency operations, such as seed distribution, extension advice, conservation agriculture, and treadle-pump irrigation. We did not observe the next follow-up phase, FAO's longer-term development activities, but we did hear criticism that the latter are not as effective as its emergency projects. In any case, there may be some anomaly that the USG is not as involved in supporting emergency operations as it is in other parts of the pipeline. FAO's emergency projects were actually

where the organization seemed to be at its best, but where it relied almost entirely on extra-budgetary contributions. We would recommend that Washington consider whether we may want to earmark more resources for this vital stage that, at least in southern Africa, appears to be launching farmers at least toward full subsistence production.

CLEVERLEY

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